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CORRODIES AT WORCESTER IN THE 14TH CENTURY.

SOME CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN THE
CROWN AND THE PRIORY OF WORCESTER
IN THE REIGN OF EDWARD II. CONCERNING
THE CORRODY OF ALICIA CONAN,

WITH

A SUMMARY OF THE CORRESPONDENCE.

EDITED FOR

THE WORCESTERSHIRE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

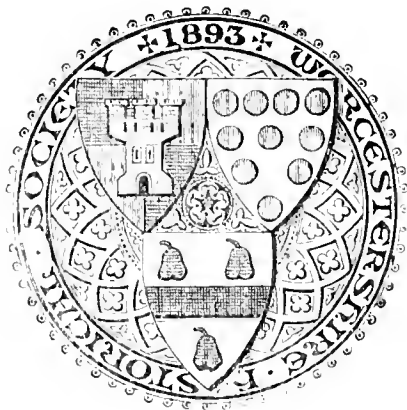
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CORRODIES AT WORCESTER IN THE 14TH CENTURY.

*Some Correspondence between the Crown and the
Priory of Worcester in the reign of Edward II. concerning
the Corrody of Alicia Conan.*

An *inscriptum* of Edward III.,¹ dated June 8, 1337, records the summons and pleading of the Prior of Worcester before King Edward II. at different dates in the Michaelmas term of 1327. The prior is called upon to shew cause why a corrody, formerly granted at the king's request by the Convent of Worcester to one Peter d'Avilliers, deceased, should not be transferred to a lady in writing to Queen Isabella, Alicia Conan. The prior pleads his inability owing to the bad times. The king refuses to accept this excuse, repeats his mandate, and summons the prior to appear again on the day following All Souls' Day to shew cause wherefore he disobeys so many commands. On this day the prior asserts that his monastery is held, and always has been held, in *frank almon*; that accordingly he has the right to claim exemption from all such charges; none had indeed ever been imposed upon the monastery until the king, nine² years before, sent them Peter d'Avilliers. Asked to produce his charters, the prior replies that he has not at present got them at hand. The proceedings are adjourned to the 15th day after Hilary. On this occasion the king's attorney, Adam Fyncham, states that before Peter, one Nicholas Kenty had been received by the priory; and before Nicholas, one John le Barber, and both at the king's command. The prior admits that this is true, but produces a charter by which Edgar king of England granted the monastery certain immunities; the possessions of the

¹ Patent Roll, 11 Edward III., Part II., m. 30. A second copy of this document is preserved in the Worcester Cathedral library on the fly-leaf of the so-called *Regis, cum Prioratus Beate Marie Wigorniensis*, and is published by Archdeacon Hade in his edition of this *Regis*, 1800 (Camden Society's Publications, 1805), pp. 175—180. A curious summary appears in the Calendar of the Patent Rolls, published by the Master of the Rolls.

² Peter d'Avilliers was received by the convent in 1320, *sc.*, three years before, 1327, Close Roll, 14 Edward II., m. 13d.

monks were enumerated and confirmed; and it was decreed that it should not be right nor lawful for any prince or bishop thereafter to withdraw or intrude anything Now this charter had been confirmed by the present king. Adam points out, however, that no mention is made therein of the priory being held in *frank almoin*, as the prior had claimed. Judgment is therefore claimed for the king, but the prior is to appear again on the Octave of the Purification. On this day the case is again adjourned to three weeks after Easter. And the prior now urges a new argument: King Edward II. himself at York, desiring to amend the estate of the Church, granted a number of petitions presented by the bishops: and among these petitions it was granted that the king and magnates of the realm should not unduly charge religious houses with corrodies and pensions, because such charges led to the impoverishment of the religious, and hindered them in the performance of their duties. To this the king has no answer and the prior is ordered to go home *sine die*, the king however reserving his right to speak further in the matter.

So much the *insperimus* tells us. On Dec. 29, 1322, Close Roll 16 Edward II.¹ records the request made by the king to the prior on behalf of Alicia Conan. On July 1, 1327, Patent Roll 1 Edward III.² records a promise made by the king that the grant by the prior and convent of St. Mary, Worcester, at the request of Queen Isabella, to Alicia Conan of £10 a year for her maintenance should not prejudice them or their successors as a precedent. Now the pleading recorded in the *insperimus* left the prior justified in his refusal to succour the lady. And, indeed, another entry in Patent Roll 1 Edward III.³ leads us to conclude that in fact the queen herself was obliged to find the money, for it records the ratification on May 3, 1327, "in favour of Alice Conan, damsel of Queen Isabella, of the said queen's grant to her of £20 a year for life out of the issues of the said queen's lands in High Peak." The date of this entry is, however, it will be noticed, earlier than that of the promise of Edward III. we have quoted, by two months.

These documents furnish the gist of one of the discussions that were frequent between Church and Crown in the 14th century. But the bare entries of the Chancery Rolls leave much to conjecture. We should like to know whether in fact Church or Crown was victorious; what is the value of the first arguments advanced by the prior; and why, having a cogent argument for his refusal, did he prefer first to advance reasons it was not difficult to deny?

A manuscript preserved in the Cathedral library of Worcester contains a series of letters which illuminate the matter. The *Liber Albus*⁴ is already known, it has been described by Dr. Poole in his report on the Worcester

¹ m. 18d.

² Part II., m. 4.

³ Part II., m. 22.

⁴ A note pinned to the fly-leaf says: "Liber Albus, so called it is presumed from the circumstance of its being originally bound in boards of *white sycamore*, which were so full of grubs and so moth-eaten as to require removal from the book, which was bound in white vellum under my superintendence in the year 1824—Henry Clifton."

manuscripts.¹ It is the letter-book and record of documents relating to the convent from 1301 to 1446. It consists of 497 folios, and must contain little short of 1,000,000 words. Canon Wilson is at present engaged in making an index to this volume. Scattered among its pages from fol. 31b, to fol. 1, 12, is a series of letters from King Edward II. and his queen Isabella and the chancellors Hugh le Despenser and Robert de Baldock to the convent and prior Wolestan of Bransford, with their replies. There are fifty-one letters in all, a few of them formal mandates in Latin, the others are in French. They are long letters for the most part, full of verbiage and repetitions. But they make the dry bones live. We publish a summary of them in English, giving the chief points textually in the Latin or French of the original. As we consider them we shall see how this small incident affords a curious example of mediæval mentality, and a not insignificant illustration of certain phases of the later years of Edward II. Before passing to the letters it will be useful to place before ourselves a few definitions, and to examine a little more closely the *inspetimus* we have just quoted; we shall then see how the letters answer the questions raised by this document.

A glance at the history of corrodies explains why discussions concerning these grants were so frequent. A corrody² in the late 12th, 13th and 14th centuries, and until the Reformation, was a grant made by monasteries, of food, clothing and lodging, often with a small sum of money, and, according to the condition of the person received, a suitable allowance for a horse and a servant. The conditions under which the grants were made were set forth in letters patent, sealed with the common seal of the convent. Corrodies were granted as a reward for past services,³ or for past and future services.⁴ In such cases the conditions are named in the deed for the corrody, and power of coercion or distraint is sometimes given to the king's servants or bailiffs. Or a corrody could be bought for a sum of money paid down, exactly like an

¹ *Historical MSS. Commission*, XIVth Report, Appendix, Part VIII, London, 1895, pp. 170-7.

² The original meaning of *corrodium*, *corrodiū*, was food and lodging supplied by vassals to lords on circuit. A charter of Louis VII. of 1157 frees certain towns in France from these charges: "*Ut nec nostro nec aliorum tempore . . . quedam convivia quæ vulgo coreede vel giste vocantur, in prædictis villis exigere . . . liceat.*" Guérard *Cartulaire de Notre Dame de Paris*, Paris, 1850, t. I., p. 270-1. (Cf. a charter of Henry I. in *Charter Rolls*, vol. ii., p. 81. The word is first used, to my knowledge, in its later sense in a deed of 1197: "*Hec est concessio inter Canonicos Sanctæ Trinitatis Londonienses et Robertum Triket . . . Et pro hac concessione prædicti canonici non esserunt prædicto Roberto Triket unum corrodiū ad servientem, scilicet qualibet die unum panem etc.*" (Public Record Office, Ancient Deeds, No. A 3889). Henry III., however, generally uses the word *gariso* (cf. *Charter Rolls*, vol. iv., p. 125). *Liberatio* is also used in the same sense, and sometimes *pensio*, though this is generally reserved for an allowance of money alone.

³ Vide Close Roll, 16 Edward I., m. 10d., and *Liber Albus*, 97b, etc.

⁴ Thus at Worcester a corrody is granted to Philip de Draycote: "*quamdū eisdem ministerium suum placuerit in officio armigeri obsequium sedulum et fidele pro pessa suo præstabit.*" (*Liber Albus*, t. 150b.)

annuity,¹ or for a quantity of land bequeathed.² We gather that sometimes people sold their corrodies, for clauses came to be inserted in the deeds to the effect that they were "not transferable."³ Founders and benefactors of monasteries claimed the right to ask for corrodies for their dependents, and in the same way the king claimed the right to appoint to corrodies in houses of royal foundation. Fortescue,⁴ writing in the 15th century (1471—1476), says: "And yf hit will lyke the kyng to geve no corrodie nor pencion wiche he hath be ryght off his coroune, off every abbey, priory and other howses founded upon hospitalite be any off his progenitors . . . then shall men off his howsold be rewarded with corodyes, and have honeste sustenance in ther olde dayis when thei may no longer serve." In a large number, especially of the earlier corrodies, granted at the king's request, no conditions are named and no claims invoked.⁵ But in the 13th and 14th centuries such peremptory requests became rare: some custom is invoked, such as that of the king's prerogative upon the nomination of a new abbot or prior;⁶ or the request concludes with a promise of royal favour to the monastery.⁷ And as early as the 13th century we find monasteries rebelling altogether against these charges. And even after they have been accepted, attempts at evading their undertakings are numerous. In 1255 Henry III.⁸ is obliged to remind the abbot and convent of Michelney in Somerset of their duty "with regard to Ralph de Heyles and Iseult his wife . . . whom they have driven hither and thither, withdrawing from them the small portion which they had granted to them in their house, whereby the said R. is oppressed." Occasionally a grant of maintenance was by agreement commuted for a sum of money; thus at Worcester John le Barber⁹ agrees that if he is absent the sum of 4s. per week shall be paid to him in place of his allowance, on condition that no attempt is made to question his resumption of the allowance on his return: "*ac etiam eandem liberationem dictis religiosi concedo pro quatuor solid. sterlingorum qualibet ebdomada mihi vel certo attornato meo solvendis, cum contigerit mihi personaliter abesse, ita quod, cum præsens fuero, predictam liberationem plenarie rehoceam sine contradictione.*" In some cases complete release and the abolition of a corrody were obtained by a grant of lands to the king¹⁰ or a payment

¹ Thus one William de Schakewich, a mason, buys a corrody at Worcester for £60. (*Liber Albus*, f. 76a.)

² As in the deed of Robert Triket quoted above, *Ancient Deeds*, No. A 588g.

³ *Ancient Deeds*, No. B 1498.

⁴ *Governance of England* (Ed. Plummer, Oxford, 1885), p. 153-4.

⁵ e.g., Close Roll, 20 Edward I., m. 11d., and 24 Edward I., m. 11d.

⁶ Close Roll, 22 Edward III., Part I., m. 25d.

⁷ We shall have occasion later to refer to this promise.

⁸ Patent Roll, 39 Henry III., Part II., m. 11d.

⁹ John de Kemeseye, the king's barber, whom the convent received with great reluctance after much discussion in 1316, was a leper "*qui vadez chascun jour entre nous dont avons grant abhominacioun.*" (*Liber Albus*, f. 97b.)

¹⁰ *Ancient Deeds*, No. A 5461.

in money.¹ This did not always ensure, however, that the requests would not be renewed at a later date.²

In the 15th century repeated scandals were brought before the king and parliament: notably houses obtained money by the sale of corrodiess, and then repudiated the corrodiess by obtaining exemptions from the king.³ In some cases religious houses were seriously impoverished by the excessive number of corrodiess granted. Thus the convent of St. Bartholomew, Gloucester, being impoverished by the excessive granting of corrodiess, the prior of St. Oswald's, Gloucester, is ordered to seize such corrodiess into the king's hands.⁴

In the first year of Edward III. a statute dealt with the question in general terms: "Whereas archbishops, bishops, abbots, priors have been before this time sore grieved by the king's requests and his progenitors, who have desired them by great threats for their clerks and other servants for great pensions, prebendary churches and corodies so that they might nothing give nor do to such as had done them service nor to their friends, to their great charge and damage, the king granteth that from henceforth he will no more such things desire but where he ought."⁵ And throughout the reign we find different monasteries claiming and obtaining individual exemption.⁶ They did not always get it without a struggle: thus in 1340 the abbot of St. John's, Colchester,⁷ is summoned to plead before the king. He pleads that his house should be free from such charges, being founded in *frank almon*. The king urges precedents. Judgment is given for the abbot. The same happens at Waverley in 1341,⁸ and again at Dieulaeres in 1346.⁹

Now the prior of Worcester seems to have led the way in this matter, for the question, raised there as we have seen in 1316 in the case of John le Barber, is thrashed out in the years 1322—1327 in the case of Alice Conan.

Let us now examine the *inspeimus* concerning this latter case. The proceedings may be divided into four parts: (i) the prior begins by pleading his poverty. This he had done repeatedly in 1316, but then as now without success.

(ii) When the king refuses to accept this reason, the prior claims that his monastery is held in *frank almon*. The custom of holding land in "free alms" is of great antiquity,¹⁰ and it extended greatly in the 15th century. In

¹ Patent Roll, 22 Edward IV., Part I., m. 15.

² Patent Roll, 21 Edward III., Part IV., m. 12.

³ *Parliament Rolls*, vol. iii., p. 520a, and vol. iv., p. 104, § 28.

⁴ Patent Roll, 32 Edward III., Part I., m. 17d.

⁵ *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. Record Commission, 1810, vol. i., p. 256, 1 Edward III., stat. 2, c. x.

⁶ *Vile Calendar of Charter Rolls*, vol. v., *passim*.

⁷ Patent Roll, 14 Edward III., Part III., m. 12.

⁸ Patent Roll, 15 Edward III., Part II., m. 6.

⁹ Patent Roll, 20 Edward III., Part I., m. 7.

¹⁰ *Vile Pollock and Maitland: History of English Law*, Cambridge, 1898, vol. i., pp. 240—251.

the 14th we frequently find claims¹ put forward to exoneration from aids and different dues, on the ground that the claimants hold their land in free alms. And thus the prior of Worcester claims that he has a charter granting him tenure of his possessions in free alms, and declares that no such corrodiess have before been levied on him. But he does not produce his charter.

(iii) He produces his charter. This is a well-known document.² It bears the date 964. It is preserved in numerous manuscripts of late date,³ but the earliest copies extant are those contained in the *Registrum Prioratus Wigorniensis*,⁴ and in a Harleian MS. which may perhaps date from the 12th century.⁵ It was unknown to Heming, the Saxon monk of Worcester, who, in the late 11th century, at the request of Bishop Wulstan, compiled a cartulary⁶ of the foundation deeds then extant in the Worcester library. No mention of it is made in the confirmation of royal charters by Edward I.⁷ We first hear of it in an *insperimus* of Edward II., dated Westminster, 3 February 1312.⁸ It occurs frequently in confirmations of charters by Edward III., Edward IV., Richard II. The document is generally admitted to be a forgery,⁹ but it is of ancient date, and the statements it makes probably represent the truth approximately.

It asserts the dominion of the English king (basileus) over the whole of the British Isles; it recalls the foundation and reformation of English monasteries undertaken in the reign of Edgar, and refers especially to the reform in the matter of the marriage of the clergy. It confirms the monastery of Worcester, as we have seen, in all its possessions, movable and immovable, and forbids the alienation of any of these possessions, and it enumerates these possessions at length.

As the prior does not at first produce his charter, a suspicion crosses our minds that some rehandling of the document may have taken place between the two appearances of the prior before the king. But the only clause which could apply to the question of corrodiess, that which deals with the monastery's possessions, is to be found in the 12th century manuscript. This suspicion therefore falls to the ground. But the charter is not admitted as evidence, because there is no mention in it of the words *frank almon*. Moreover the

¹ *Parliament Rolls*, vol. i., pp. 166b, 321b, 331a, etc.

² Kemble, *Codex Diplomaticus*, 1848, vol. vi., p. 237. Birch, *Cartularium Saxonicum*, 1803, vol. iii., p. 377.

³ British Museum MS. Arundel 26, f. 51, Harleian 358, f. 48b, Harleian 3875, f. 368.

⁴ Ed. cit., p. 21b, 24b, and see *Introduction*, pp. xxx—xxxiv.

⁵ Harleian MS., No. 7513.

⁶ *Hemingi Chartularium Ecclesie Wigorniensis*. Ed. Hearn, Oxford, 1723. The copy printed in vol. ii., p. 517, of Hearn's edition is from an 18th century Cartulary of Worcester contained in MS. Cott. Vitellius, C. 1X., 2, f. 58.

⁷ Patent Roll, 10 Edward I., m. 10.

⁸ *Original Charters relating to the City of Worcester*. Ed. Bloom, Worcester Historical Society, 1909, p. 151.

⁹ F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond*, Cambridge, 1907, p. 268 and p. 452. Cf. Stubbs, *Constitutional History*, Oxford, 1897, vol. i., p. 118.

king's attorney points out that, contrary to the prior's assertion, a number of corrodies had been granted in the monastery: to Peter d'Avilliers, Nicholas Renty, John le Barber, etc.

The *Liber Albus* here furnishes a number of details. After the rejection of his charter and the proof of his untruthfulness, and when judgement has been pronounced against him, the prior still maintains the truth of his assertion; indeed he still refers to the charter,¹ and moreover finds confirmation for it in a corrody grant² made at the request of Edward I. for John le Treour,³ for it was then "understood" that the house of Worcester was held in *frank almoyn*. And he now hints at a bargain: the corrody requested by the late king was granted because the late king's devotion to St. Wulstan was well known; it had caused him to confer great benefits on the monastery. In this case the parish of Lindridge in the diocese of Hereford had been bestowed upon the convent of Worcester.

Now there is no more reference to foundation in *frank almoyn* in the request for this corrody by Edward I. than in Edgar's charter. The mandate runs thus:⁴ "*Edwardus rex, dilectis sibi in Christo priori et conventui Wygorniensium salutem. Quia dilecto servienti nostro Johanni le Trayor, latori presentium, qui nobis, jamdiu est, bene et fideliter deservivit, modo vite sue necessariis nondum provisum est, ut vellemus, ipsum ad vos duximus destinandum, rogantes cum affectu quatinus eundem Johannem in domo vestra curialiter admittentes, ipsum in victu et vestitu, quoad viverit, prout Ricardo le Portur de Garderoba nostra defuncto, ad nostrum rogatum in domo vestra nuper admissio, vite sue necessaria exhibuisti, exhiberi intuitu patiat, ita quod volis et domui vestre in agendis vestris efficiamur promptiores, prefato Johanni vestras inde patentes litteras concedentes. Edwardus rex apud Thurgarton, xii. di. Aprilis.*"⁵

The promise of royal favour which concludes this request is in the usual general terms. We do find however that a little later, June 1, 1307, licence⁶ was granted to the prior and convent "to appropriate the Church of Lyndrugg⁷ in the diocese of Hereford, of their own patronage, in order to augment

¹ Letters 35, 37.

² Letter 33. *Liber Albus*, i. 263a.

³ Treour, traïor, trayor; a draw-er (from *tirer*) of javelins, of arrows, of wine, of taxes, or of coal! (Godefroi, *Dictionnaire de l'ancienne langue française, ad verbum*.)

⁴ Close Roll, 31 Edward I., m. 13d.

⁵ The *Registrum Sede Vacante* (Ed. J. W. Willis-Bund, W.H.S., Oxford, 1897, p. 39), contains another copy of this letter, dated however at Windsor, Feb. 4, 1302. It contains also (p. 39) a letter from John de Drokenesford making the same request, and (p. 43) record of a grant dated March 1, 1302, in accordance with these requests, and an acknowledgment of the grant bearing the same date by John le Trayor.

⁶ Patent Roll, 35 Edward I., m. 13.

⁷ Lindridge in Worcestershire. The Patent Roll does not give the earliest documents concerning this appropriation. The *Registrum Ricardi Swinfield* (Ed. W. Capes, Canterbury and York Society, 1909, p. 421) contains a letter dated Nov. 25, 1305, by which the bishop requests the king to excuse him if he does not consent to the appropriation of

their convent by three monks, and to find two wax lights continually burning before the shrine of St. Wulstan."

And indeed we find that although Edward I.'s requests for corrodies were numerous, he did in fact confer privileges and grants of land in return.¹

Now Edward II. had nothing so definite to offer. He makes constantly the same promise of royal favour; we shall see that practically all his requests include such a sentence, but that is all. So the prior does not move, his mind is made up, he simply continues to delay.

And finally (part iv. of the proceedings recorded in the *insperimus*) pleads a concession made by Edward II. himself at the petition of the bishops. This concession forms indeed a part of the *Articuli Cleri* of 1315. The text² runs thus: "*Item petitur quod dominus Rex et regni magnates non onerent domos religiosas vel ecclesiasticas personas pro corrodii pensionibus vel prehensionibus faciendis in domis religiosis et aliis locis ecclesiasticis, caretis et equis sibi mittendis, cum per hoc praedictae domus depauperentur, cultusque divinus in hac parte diminuatur et propter hujusmodi onera compelluntur saepissime presbyteri et alii ministri ecclesiastici divinis officiis deputati a locis recedere supradictis.*"

Responsio. *Placet domino regi quod super contentis in petitione de cetero indebite non onerentur. Et si per magnates aut alios contra fiat, habeant inde remedium juxta formam statutorum tempore domini Edwardi regis patris regis nunc editorum. Et fiat consimile remedium de corrodii exactis de quibus non fit mentio in statutis.*"

And this won the prior's case. The king has nothing more to say. Yet two years after the granting of these very articles Worcester had received Geoffrey le Corouner³ (it is true they protested⁴); two years later again Peter d'Avilliers; while John le Traior still held his corrody. Nor was there any diminution in the granting of corrodies elsewhere; on the contrary, on all sides they multiplied exceedingly in the reign of Edward II.

For the *Articuli Cleri* were indeed but a piece of legislation, like the famous Ordinances so frequently re-enacted, but which remained, as Professor Tout⁵ excellently says, "like most mediæval legislation . . . an ideal of

Lindridge to the prior and convent of Worcester. A number of letters follow (pp. 433 to 437) shewing the bishop and the dean and chapter resisting, and finally yielding in the matter. The monks of Worcester claimed the church of Lindridge as a gift of Wigterth duke of the Mercians, and his wife Alta (*vide Registrum Prioratus Wigorniensis*, ed. cit., p. 106).

¹ See especially the Calendar of Patent Rolls, Edward I., 1281—1292.

² *Statutes of the Realm*, ed. cit., vol. i., p. 173. Hale (*Registrum*, cit., p. cxxvi.) says that it was in the Statute of Marlborough, 1 Edward I., 1326 (*sic*), that the king complied with the request of the archbishops that he would not burden them with corrodies. I can find no reference to the matter in the Statute of Marlborough of 1267. (*Statutes of the Realm*, ed. cit., vol. i., p. 19.)

³ Close Roll, 12 Edward II., m. 31d.

⁴ *Liber Albus*, 88b.

⁵ *The Place of the Reign of Edward II. in English History*, Oxford, 1914, p. 29.

reformation working in men's brains, rather than a new act of parliament which it was intended to carry out." It was not then through the intrinsic worth of his arguments that the prior won. He won by his method of applying them; for through all his delaying and postponing time had fought on his side: so that the discussion opened in 1308, and kept open until 1327, was then closed on a wholly different note. For as the months and years pass the king's power declines, while the monastery, despite the prior's repeated protestations of poverty, prospers, new buildings are begun and completed, and the prior's personal power grows through the vacancy of the bishopric; until at length he is strong enough to gain his point by appealing to the *Articuli Cleri*, to bend the general principle conceded therein to his particular case, and to obtain immunity for his house from thenceforth. A better example of mediæval practical realism could scarcely be found.

Now the letters of the *Liber Albus* reveal this shifting attitude of prior to king and king to prior, and therein lies their significance. In 1322 the king orders; the prior replies tardily, but his refusal is couched in the humblest terms, and although he cannot receive the lady, a pension of 10 marks shall be granted her with letters patent under the common seal. This is the position during the early months of 1323 (Letters 9 to 19). The king next threatens, accuses the prior of contempt of the royal rights, and the prior, while still begging the queen for pity, takes a more vigorous attitude, suggests that he on his side is within his rights, yet continues his offer of 10 marks under the common seal (Letters 20 to 29, months May to Sept. 1323). Then the king gets angry and summons the prior to court; the prior audaciously pretends that his house is exempt, compares the impositions of the present king with the generosity of his father, but the court dismisses his claims because they are false (Letters 30 to 37, Sept. 1323 to Feb. 1324). The king now returns to his former peremptoriness, the queen urges promises of favour, but the prior maintains his defiant attitude, continues to brandish his charter, and no longer even mentions the 10 marks; and thus the pleading is resumed and readjourned (Letters 38 to 45, Feb. to April 1324). Then before the final pleading the king weakens, accepts the former offer of a grant in money under the common seal; which now however the convent refuses; the queen begs and renews promises of favour (Letters 45 to 49, April 1324). At the final pleading the prior is triumphant, the king humble in regard to charters but renewing offers of favour, the prior entrenching himself behind the convent's refusal (Letters 49 to 51), but finally coming to his bargain: he will give 10 marks without letters patent and only under his private seal; out of his personal goodness he will give them and not out of any king's right, and on condition that he receives letters patent in return, undertaking that this shall be the last corrody exacted from the Convent of Worcester.

So when in 1327 Edward III. examines the convent's record, he acquiesces in the position it has attained. The prior handsomely makes out the deed for £10 instead of 10 marks. But we doubt whether the lady ever received them; we have seen Queen Isabella make other provision for her, and no

mention is made of her in the surviving cellarer's accounts at Worcester.¹ But we may also remark that as soon as 1335 one John Usher is sent by the king to take the corrody of John le Traior,² and in 1359 one Leo de Perton to take the place of Joan de Boys.³ Whether these were received or not we do not know; the *Liber Albus*⁴ shews us that the prior at least did not fail to protest.

¹ Of that period only those for 6—7, 10—11, 12—13 Edward III. remain in the Cathedral Library (C 56, 57, 58).

² Close Roll, 9 Edward III., m. 25d.

³ Close Roll, 32 Edward III., m. 1d.

⁴ f. 214b.

SUMMARY OF THE CORRESPONDENCE.

1. The correspondence begins in 1308, in the first year of the reign of Edward the Second. The Queen, Isabel, writes to the Prior and Convent of Worcester on behalf of Alicia Conan, lady in waiting to the King's niece,¹ Dame Alienor La Despensier (*sic*), to ask for a *livraison* (*liberatio*, allowance) for her in their convent.

We give this letter in full as a specimen; the others will be given only in abstract. They contain so much of rehearsal and repetition that it would be tedious to print them in full:—

“Littera Regine pro liberatione Alicie Conan.

Isabel, par la grace de Dieu Reyne d'Angleterre, dame d'Irlande, et duchesse d'Aquitaine, a religieux hommes et honestes nos amez le priour et le convent de Wyrecestre salut et bonne amour. Chiers uns, pour ce que nous avons esperance que vous oiez volontiers nos prieres, envoions a vous, et vous prions et requérons affectueusement tant come nous poons, pour nostre bien amee Alice Conan, damoiselle de nostre tres-chere et amee nece dame Alienor La Despensier, que vous a la dite Alice vueillez grantier donner et otroier des maintenant une livraison en vostre meson a sa vie a prendre chescun jour dont elle puist estre bien soustenue; et de ce vueillez tant fere, pour l'amour de nostre Seigneur Jhu Christ et de nous, si tost et si courtoisement, que Diex et nous, qui desirons son avauncement, vous en doions mercier. Et nous rescrirez par le portour de ceste lettre ce que vous en voudrez fere pour nostre priere. Nostre Seigneur soit garde de vous. Doné a Wydestok a .xxvi. jour de Juin.” (f. 31, b.)

2. To this letter the *Liber Albus* shews us two replies: first a letter to say that they are so burdened with allowances, both by the late and the present King, that they are unable to grant the queen's request; second an alternative reply conveyed by one of the brethren in person, nostre frere A. de B.,² asking her to accept

¹ Alienor, wife of Hugh le Despenser the Younger, was the daughter of Joan Plantagenet, Edward II.'s sister, who married Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester.

² Possibly one Alexander de Briardale, the only A. de B. who appears in the complete list of the 47 monks of the monastery on f. 83, b., of our manuscript.

his reply as theirs. There is nothing to indicate which of the two, the *responsio* or the *altera responsio per credentiam*, was sent. Possibly the first was followed up by the second. (f. 31, b.)

3. The King then writes from Wallingford on 7th July 1328 to support the Queen's request: "*Nous vous prions cherelement que la requeste que la Reyne vous ad faite . . . coillez gracieusement et bonement acomplir.*" (f. 32, a.)

4. The Convent replies by requesting the King to give an interview to one of their monks, John de St. Briavel,¹ who will speak on behalf of the King's liege subjects: "*Prions humblement que ce que vous dirra de par nous vostres liges suggerz deigne: oyer, et par ses dits nous avoir excusez.*" (f. 32, a.)

The matter dropped for many years. Alicia Conan became one of ladies-in-waiting on the Queen, and in 1322 the matter is revived.

5. The King's first mandate is in Latin. It is dated from York, 29th Dec. 1322. It orders that the sustentation for life which, in obedience to a former mandate,² had been given to Peter d'Avilliers, lately deceased, should be transferred to Alicia Conan, a lady in waiting to Queen Isabella, in reward of her good service; and the deed must bear the common seal of the Convent. In return the King promises to be favourably disposed to the Convent, should occasion arise: "*Volumus enim vobis exinde teneri specialius temporibus oportunis.*"³ (f. 107, b.)

6. The second letter is from the Chancellor, Hughe le Despenser (Junior) (*le fuiz*). It also is dated at York on the following day, 30th Dec. 1322. It merely repeats the mandate of the King. (f. 107, b.)

¹ John de St. Briavel (the name, which occurs only once in England, in Gloucestershire, is that of the Norman saint Ebrulfus, S. Evroult) is an eminent member of the Convent, and was selected to represent them at the General Chapter in Northampton in 1301 (*Liber Albus*, f. 2, a.), and at the Concilium Provinciale held in St. Paul's Cathedral in 1309 (*Liber Albus*, f. 41, b.)

² Close Roll, 14 Edward II., m. 13d., 22 November 1320. The *Liber Albus* gives three letters from the King on behalf of Peter: (i) f. 97, b., dated Jan. 7th, 1320; (ii) f. 99, b., Nov. 22nd; and (iii) f. 99, b., Dec. 6th, 1320.

³ Cf. the request for John le Truor, quoted above and the end of Letter 38 below. The phrase reappears in French in Letter 49, where the sense is quite clear: "*. . . puissons . . . c'etre specialment tenue a nous et a nostre maison si par cas aiez affaire devers nous.*"

7. A few days later, 4th Jan. 1323, Queen Isabel writes in the same sense from Clipsham in Rutland, but as an appeal and personal request, pleading Alicia's long service, rather than as a mandate: "*Nous vous prions tant comme nous pouvons . . . que vueillez accomplir . . . pour l'amour de nous . . . car nous avons ceste nostre priere mout a cuer (très à cœur) pour le bon service que elle nous a longement fait avant ces heures.*" (f. 107, b.)

8. Five weeks pass after the despatch of these letters, and now the Queen writes on 12th Feb. 1323 from the Tower of London. She recites the mandate of the King, and expresses her surprise that the Convent, as she understands, has taken no steps to carry it out, and has not even answered her letter: "*Comme . . . donné nous soit a entendre que vous n'avez rien fait encore, ne nous en avez mie¹ voulu donner response, de quoi nous nous merveillons.*" (f. 108, b.)

9. The Convent replies at some length on 28th Feb. 1323. Never within the memory of man had the convent been so poor, nor had it suffered such misfortunes: they could not meet the present necessary expenses: "*A vostre bonté noblement fesonz a savoir que de nulz temps dont home pourra s'envenir ne fuist nostre maison si povre n'en tant de meschief comme elle est meinte-vant par pluseurs et divers chaucez et grevancez que sont avenuz ore en-piece² que ne suffist pas comme afferroit (aferir —convenir: to be fitting) a nostre estat et ceo que sumes levez fait et meinteoir.*"

Also they beg the Queen to be good enough to reflect that it is undesirable that ladies should spend their lives in houses of religion³: "*S'il vous pleist vueillez bonement entendre que sojourn de damoiselles a leur vies en mesonz de religion plus tost tourne a*

¹ Mie, *mica* (miette), used in old French to strengthen the negative. (cf. ne — pas, ne — goutte; and English, not a bit(e).)

² Ore en piece: *horam in petra* — now at the present time. *Piece* (connected in origin with *petit*) is used in old French in the sense of a piece of time, cf. *pieça* — il y a pièce, i.e., some time ago.

³ Ladies do appear to have been admitted to corrodies, however, at Worcester as elsewhere: v. *Lib. Lib. ec.* i. 138, b., a gift to *Adel de la Wodehille*; and t. 140, b., to a husband and wife. In 1358 Edward III. claims a corrody which had been held by Johanna de Boys, t. 214, b., but the prior indignantly replies that this lady was not lodged in the monastery, but in a house near Kidderminster.

desaveuaintise et damage que a covenableté ou profit." So they beg to be excused. Nevertheless, to gratify the wishes of the King and Queen, they are willing out of their poverty to grant to the lady ten marks¹ a year, and pay it at such times as she may wish : "*Nepurquant (ne pro quantum, i.e., nevertheless) en pleisauance des prieres nostre Seigneur le Roi et de voz, de nostre petitesse enforceromz de faire a la dite damoiselle par an diis marcs . . . et selom que elle voudra ordeiner a certeinz termes paier.*" (f. 109, a.)

10. To this the Queen replies on 15th March 1323, still writing from the Tower of London. She briefly recapitulates her request, and their excuse and offer, and points out that this sum is not the equivalent of what Peter² had received : "*Nous n'entendons pas que celle somme se estande a la value de ce que le dit Pierre avoit.*" She therefore repeats the original request. (f. 109, a.)

11. The Convent replies on "*le mardy proscheyn après le jour de Pasch,*" i.e., 29th March.³ They repeat that the sojourn of a lady among them would not be convenient for many reasons : "*ne serroit avenant entre nous par moultz enchesons*"; they have therefore offered her a pension of ten marks a year; and they mentioned along with this that they were for plain reasons unable to do more : "*Nunciantz ore (apud : avec) ce a vostre nobleze que nostre poer par notories enchesouns (incasiones = occasions) a plus ne poet suffire.*" They fear that this latter reason has not been told to the Queen, for they are sure that a lady, so noble and reasonable in her compassion as she is, would neither charge anyone, nor willingly allow anyone to be charged beyond their power : "*Que si noble dame et resnable en pité com vous estes ne*

¹ A mark, which was never a coin in England, was the equivalent of two-thirds of a pound sterling. Alicia's pension would be therefore under £7 a year, which would be roughly the equivalent of £56 at the present time.

² The allowance made to Peter was the same as that made to Nicholas de Renty. It is specified in letter 18 below : A monk's loaf, a servant's loaf, a gallon and a half of beer, a dish from the kitchen (a prior's allowance), and a servant's dish (a prior's servant's allowance). The text of the Close Roll referring to this corrody runs somewhat differently. The necessities of life in food and clothing and shoe leather, maintenance for a horse and groom and a chamber for life. (Close Roll, 8 Edw. II., m. 28 d.)

³ Easter Day 1323 was March 27th.

chargerent nulz outre souz poer ne ne seuffrent estre chargé de souz roler." (f. 109, a.)

12. The King also, writing from Langley¹ on 25th April, repeats his demand that Alice should receive the full amount formerly granted to Peter, so that she may not be further troubled, and that it may not be necessary to take other measures because of the Convent's failure in the matter: "*Issint (in sic = ainsi que, provided that) q'il ne coveigne² mie que la dite Alice soit plus travaillée ne q'autre remede y soit mis par vostre defaute.*" (f. 109, b.)

13. On 3rd May 1323 the Convent replies that their funds, in consequence of various mishaps, do not enable them to do more at present: "*Nostre estat par divers meschiefs que nous avons ne suffît mie a plus faire a lui a ore.*" They beg for God's sake in the name of charity that the King will please to command Alice to accept it: "*Humblement vous requerons par Dieu en noun de charité que vous pleise commander a vostre dite damoiselle que celle voile de ceo agréir.*" (f. 109, b.)

14. The Queen had also written on 27th April from Oakham in terms which suggest that the King's letter of the 25th had been sent to her. She is much surprised at their excuses: "*Mout nos merveillons des excusations que vous nous avez faites.*" She begs the prior out of regard for the wishes of the King, and for the affection she bears to the lady, to carry out to the letter the King's mandate, so that both she and the King may be satisfied and other measures need not be taken: "*Issint que li et nous poons agréir et que il ne couviegne pas que autre remede y soit mis.*" They are to reply by the bearer. (f. 110, a.)

15. The Convent remains perfectly firm; they cannot give Alice Conan the same allowance that they gave to Peter d'Avilliers.

¹ Kings-Langley in Hertfordshire was a chamber manor. Gaveston, the King's favourite, was buried there, *vide* Tout. "*The Place of the Reign of Edward II. in English History.*" Manchester, 1914, p. 173-4.

² Covenir is used frequently in these letters in the sense of "to be necessary."

But although they have had various misfortunes—*coment que nous soïoms diversement a meschiefs*—they beg that the lady will accept the ten marks, for in very truth they are hard pressed as all men may see, and they can do no more: “*Certainement nous nous sumes pris de mout prees (pressum, près), comme piert par notories enchesouns, que nous ne porrons a plus suffire.*” (f. 110, a.)

16. It can scarcely be an accident that on the same date as the Queen's letter, 27th April, the chancellor, Hugh le Despenser, writes from Rockingham, and earnestly appeals to them to grant the King's request. (f. 110, a.)

17. In reply to the Convent's letter of 3rd May (No. 13), the King writes on 15th May from Rothwell.¹ He thanks them for their grant of ten marks; but his intention was, and still is, that Alicia shall have all that Peter had, and that it shall be secured by their letters patent in due form, “so that we may not be moved to press you further for this matter”: “*Si que nous ne soïoms autrefoitz meüz (mourvoir) de vous presser plus avant por cette busoigne.*” He, like the Queen, demands a final answer. (f. 110, b.)

18. The Convent now replies at some length, and produces further arguments. They remind the King that in the eighth year of his reign they granted, at the King's request, to Nichol de Renty² an allowance as follows: one monk's loaf, one sergeant's loaf, a gallon and a half of good beer, and one dish from the kitchen; such an allowance as one of the esquires of the prior would have, besides a dish for his servant such as the prior's servant would have, and 20 shillings a year for all other purposes; but this allowance was given at once and without fear, on the understanding that there should be no further charge after Nichol's death: “*Cel livereson li fust granté*

¹ In Northamptonshire.

² Renty, probably the Renty (Rentiacum) in Artois, the seat of a family well known in the 13th and 14th centuries. See Laplanc in “*Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de la Morinie*,” 1858—1860, t. x., pp. 1—99. One Mirelet de Renty was one of the followers of Margaret of Anjou.

toust et sans daungers adonqe (ad dunque, then), por ce que après luy nous n'entendismes pas estre mes chargé." They could more easily have given two such allowances then than ten marks now. There had been a murrain among their cattle, and their crops had failed to such an extent that they were obliged to buy 410 quarters of corn; and through this and other calamities they are so much in debt that they scarcely find credit sufficient to maintain their estate.²

They repeat their objection to having ladies permanently in the monastery. It more often results in things unfitting and slander and damage than in propriety or profit: "*Souven de damoiseles a leur vies et mesons de Religioni plus tost tourne a desaveuanteise, esclandre, et damage que a convenableté ou a profit.*" And lastly they point out that in ordinary years ten marks was more than the equivalent of the allowance they gave to Nichol, which they had understood was not to be repeated.³ (f. 110, b.)

19. As usual, on the next day, 16th May 1323, writing also from Rothwell, the Queen echoes the King's letter, adopting a severer tone than that of her previous letters. It is not the King's intention that Alice should have less than Peter. She begs them as urgently as is in her power—"nous vous prioms derechef (*de re caput*, over again) *si acertes (ad certam) come nous poüms.*" (f. 110, b.)

20. The reply of the Convent to the Queen follows closely the lines of their reply to the King. Humbly on their knees they beg the Queen to pity them, and to deign to excuse them for the reasons they have given: "*A genuls devouement vous*

² Lat. *dominium*: originally the power of one person over another; later the liability of one person towards the person in power.

³ The same murrain among the cattle and failure of crops and purchase of corn had been urged in 1308, in 1316, in 1319, in answer to the King's requests.

⁴ Close Roll, 3 Edward II., m. 231. The *Letter Alice*, f. 105, a, furnishes us with the King's letter on behalf of Nichol de Rety, the Convent's immediate grant of the pension requested, and the letters patent granted to Nichol, and signed by him and by the Prior. These documents contain no hint of any such understanding, nor does the brief note in the Close Roll.

prioms que de nous eietz pité et deignetz nous avoir excusez par enchesours suz dites." (f. 110, b.)

21. The King is now thoroughly angry, and writes peremptorily from Bishopthorpe on 5th June 1323. He has of his right given to Alice what he had formerly given to Peter for his lifetime, and the Prior in the trivial excuses he alleges is treating him and his rights with contempt: "*Nous avoms donec a la dite Alice, puis la mort le dit Pieres, come de nostre droit; queu chose vous n'avez voluz faire ne mye sanz grant despit et contempt de nous et de nostre droit, einz (antius = but) vous avez feintement excusez par voz lettres . . .*"

Their offer of 10 marks is an encroachment on his right; he therefore orders and charges them strictly, by the faith they owe him, to give to the lady in full the pension which Peter had; and to give it, as to Peter, by letters patent, so that the King may not have to proceed severely against the Prior and Convent as disturbers of his rights: "*Tous mandoms et chargeoms fermement enjoignantz en la foi que vous nous devez . . . issint que nous ne eoms encheson d'autre suyte faire et greveusement prendre a vous come destourbeours de nostre droit.*" (f. 111, b.)

22. The Queen also writes from Bishopthorpe on 8th June in much the same tone, saying that they are annoyed and indignant that the Convent has not granted their request: "*Nous sommes mout annuiés et avoms grant indignation de ce que vous ne deignez pas acomplir noz dites prieres.*" (f. 112, a.)

23. The Convent replies to the King on 25th June 1323, with great earnestness: "God forbid that they should be disturbers of his rights or be guilty of contempt: *deux choses des queux Dieu nous defend.*" They remind him that his father never made any such claim on them, and that the grants hitherto made to Peter d'Avilliers and others were for their lives only; they were given without title,¹ so that by no right could

¹ The King certainly always demanded letters patent, and there is no reason to suppose that they had been refused in previous cases. The mandate on behalf of John

they be renewed or transferred : "*A leur vie seulement sans titre faire a nully droit par estre au refuiz chargez ou autrement.*" They ought not to diminish their hospitalities or alms : "*Si nous ne devons de ceo que le covent receyt hospitalites et certaines aumoignes en partie sestrere et amenuiser.*" (f. 111, b.)

24. The letter book, however, contains another reply to the King, "*alibi spensio ad eandem.*" It was probably this second letter that was sent.¹ It begins by reminding the King that the house of Worcester was founded by his ancestors "in pure and perpetual alms." Never had the King's father nor any of his ancestors written to them claiming any right whatsoever, but always begging them of their favour : "*. . . unques (unquam with ne, never) vostre trescher seigneur vostre pere, que Dieu assoille, ne nul autre de voz aumestres unques escreit a nous droit en chalangeant, mais estoit faitz en priant bonement . . .*" The King's requests shall be as commands to them, and they will obey them in so far as their conscience will allow, but the excuses they have offered are real, and they can only repeat them and beg the King to accept the grant of 10 marks, which they have made under their common seal. (f. 112, a.)

25. The reply to the Queen's letter of 8th June is on the same lines as that to the King's, but is briefer. The Prior and Convent have granted the 10 marks, which is more than they can afford, "*en meschief de nous,*" in order to please the King and Queen. They beg to be excused from doing more, their inability is the only obstacle : "*Car nous-poor a vostre volenté acomplir soul nous est destruire.*" (f. 112, a.)

le Prior ends with the words : "*. . . inde patentes et eas concordantes . . .*" (Close Roll, 31 Edw. I., m. 13 d.) That of Geoffrey le Coroner asks that "*. . . Hæc enim . . . quidem prædictas & solas habuit in eodem, ad altam Gelfaldi, concordare voluit peripendit . . .*" (Close Roll, 12 Edw. II., m. 31 d.) But we shall see that this letter was probably not sent. It would not have borne examination.

¹ We have seen that letter 23 asserts that former grants had been made without title. This point is, however, never discussed in the succeeding letters. Letter 24 raises the question of the Monastery's foundation in frank almon, and we have seen that this pretension was made by the Prior at his trial on Nov. 3rd of this year, and we shall see it further discussed in letter 33.

26. An interval of more than two months elapses, for the next letter from the King is dated 6th Sept. 1323 from Barnard Castle. He writes that although he had announced his resolve that Alicia should come to them, and had requested (*rogantes*) that the allowance of Peter Avyler should be continued to her, they to his great surprise had done nothing. He now therefore orders peremptorily (*mandamus*) that they shall admit Alice, and secure for her under their common seal the allowance they had given to Peter, and explain why they had not obeyed before. He tells them quite plainly that they must so behave themselves in this matter as not to give him further trouble, or he will be obliged to lay his hand upon the business in a different way : "*Taliter vos habentes in hac parte quod non oporteat nos super premissis amplius sollicitari per quod manum ad hoc aliter apponere debeamus.*" (f. 112, b.)

27. This letter of 6th Sept. did not reach the Prior till 17th Sept. As it is followed by a letter from the Queen written on 12th Sept. from Hatfield and received on the same day, and by another, undated, from the Chancellor, it is probable that all the three letters were delivered together.

After reminding the King that a sufficient corrody for the lady could be had in the nunnery at Nuneaton, the mandate, as they ingeniously interpret it, gives them the choice of either obeying the King's order or giving a reason for their refusal. They are very anxious to obey the King, but they cannot ; the badness of the times has reduced them to such poverty that they have not means to support themselves and those who depend on them : "*Malitia temporis prevalente ad tantam ducimur egestatem quod nec nobis nec nostris sufficimus quovis modo.*" They say very simply that they regret that they are unable to grant the Royal request : "*Quamobrem rogatum regium quod aulemus non possumus adimplere.*" (f. 112, b.)

28. The Queen's letter of 12th Sept. from Hatfield is a mere repetition. She and the King are astonished and annoyed that the Prior has not yet replied to the King's last letter

concerning Alice. The King's mandate must be obeyed, so that she and the King may not be moved to anger: "*En tel maniere que nostre dit seigneur et nous n'en aiens cause de nous courroucier (corruptiare, whence courrou, anger).*" (f. 113, a.)

29. In reply to the Queen's expression of surprise that she had not been answered, the Convent remind her that one of their brethren had delivered to her their reply in her room when she was staying with the Friars Minor at York. These letters shewed their inability to grant the sum asked for. That inability will continue unless God helps them: "*durra touc iours si Dieu n'y mette aide.*" (f. 113, a.)

30. The letter from the Chancellor Robert de Baldock is not preserved; but we have the reply of the Prior in his own name, and it is in a most rhetorical style.

"To him who is crowned with the brilliancies of all the sciences,¹ the Chancellor of our illustrious lord the King of England, Robert de Baldok, the brother Wulstan, prior of the Blessed Mary of Worcester, offers his due tribute of reverence and honour, with most eager devotion and desire to gratify," and so on. But the fact is "*non posse.*" (f. 113, a.)

31. The King writes on 1st Oct. 1323 from Skipton in Craven. He refuses to accept their excuse of poverty, and repeats the command—"quam quidem causam insufficientem reputantes vos adhuc rogamus sicut pluries rogavimus firmiter injungentes"—and he summons them to appear on the day after All Souls Day² before him wherever he may be in England: "*Ut vos prefate prior sitis coram nobis in crastino Animarum ubicunque tunc fuerimus in Anglia, ostensurus quare mandatis nostris predictis tociens vobis inde directis parere contempsistis. Et habeatis ibi hoc breve.*"³ (f. 113, a.)

¹ Robert de Baldock Controller of the Wardrobe and Keeper of the Privy Seal 1320—1323. Chancellor 1323—1329, was Doctor of Civil Law. *Calendar of the Register of John de Droghensford*, ed. Hobhouse, *Sovereign Record Society*, 1887, p. 215.

² Nov. 3rd.

³ The text of this mandate is identical with that preserved in the *inspeximus*.

32. On 24th Oct. 1323 the King writes from Holand,¹ and demands, probably with a view to the pleading, information as to the sum total of pensions and maintenance grants with which the priory is charged, and also copies of the mandates and requests sent them both by his late father and by himself. The Convent is also to send "*distinctement et apertement*" the names of all those with whom they are charged, and the method, the amount, the manner, and the cause of such charge—" *coment, combien, et en quele manere, et par quele cause.*" (f. 113, b.)

33. For some reason the delivery of the last letter was delayed. It is dated 24th Oct. The Convent received it on 6th Dec., and their reply is dated 7th Dec. The King therefore had not received the information he had asked for in time for the proceedings of 4th Nov. Nor was the information produced at the proceedings, as we see by the inspeximus: "*Ad quem crastinum Animarum venit predictus prior in propria persona sua et ad breve predictum sibi directum in curia hic retornatum respondet, quod ipse et omnes predecessores sui, a tempore quo non erat memoria, prioratum predictum et possessiones ejusdem prioratus hujusque tenuerunt in liberam puram et perpetuam elemosinam, quietam ab omni onere seculari, de fundatione quondam regum Anglie progenitorum domini regis aunc, per cartas ipsorum regum et confirmationes domini regis aunc, ita quod predictus prioratus nunquam aliquo alio tempore de aliqua hujusmodi sustentatione per ipsum regem seu progenitores extitit, quousque dominus rex aunc jam norem annis elapsis primo sustentatione predicti Petri de Aegler per riam rogaminis ipsum prioratum oneravit et quod non intendit quod dominus rex velit aut debeat ipsum priorem seu prioratum suum predictum in hac parte onerare, etc. Et quesitum est a prefato priore quod ostendat cartas regum, si quas inde habeat, etc. Dicit quod illas non habet paratas ad præsens. Et non est aliquis qui venit pro dicta Alicia ad informandum dominum regem super premissis, etc. Ideo datus est ei dies coram domino rege a die S. Hilarii in .xv. dies ubicunque, etc.*"

The matter having thus been adjourned to 27th January

¹ Holland in Lincolnshire.

1324, the Prior writes on 4th Dec. that the King's late father Edward I., understanding that their convent was founded "*en pure et perpetuele aumoine*," asked the Prior and Convent (*pria*) for the support of John le Treour. And the Prior and Convent, considering the great benefits the King had conferred on them, and his devotion to St. Wulstan, their patron (*leur aroné*), not of right but of their grace, had granted a monk's loaf, a gallon and a half of beer and one gown a year. But in return for this the King had given the Convent the patronage of Lindridge, and had announced to the Bishop of Hereford that the said appropriation should be made in perpetuity for the profit of his soul and of the house of Worcester: "*Et par ceo que nostre dit tres cher seigneur . . . ne voleit que nostre dite maison fust del dit Johan nous duement chargé, en recompensation de cel charge de priere, et par la deuotion q'il avoit a dist saint Wolestan, il nous donna le congé d'approprier l'église de Lindridge de nostre patronage; et tant avant de sa bone voillance q'il avoit devers nous, manda a l'evexque et chapitre de Hereford par ses lettres que la dite appropriation se prist a perpetuel profit de sa alme et nostre dite maison.*"

The pleading was resumed on 27th January, the quinzaine of St. Hilary. The King's attorney, Adam Byncham, points out that Peter d'Avilliers was not the first to receive the corrody in question. Before him it had been granted to Nicholas Renty and before him to John le Barber. The Prior replies that he is well aware that all these had been received. But King Edgar had granted certain immunities in a charter which he quotes, declaring that it shall be unlawful for any prince or even bishop to take any of their property, or put it in the hands of the secular clergy, as long as the Christian faith lasts; the property is then specified. All is free from every charge except fort building and military service, "*exceptis arcis constructione et expeditione contra hostem.*" The King, he proceeded, had confirmed this charter, and the property of the priory is part of what was therein freed from burden.

Adam replies that at the former pleading the Prior had declared that the Convent held the property in "*liberam puram et*

perpetuam elemosinam." These words are not in the charter. He therefore claims judgment for the King. The case is now postponed to the Octave of the Purification (9th Feb.). (f. 113, b.)

34. On 5th Feb. the King writes from Berkeley complaining that Alice is being put off with pleading and discussion, and expressing his indignation at the Convent's ingratitude: . . . "*faites mesner la dite Alice par riote et par ple, par quei nous nous tenoms durement a mal paiez.*" (You are dragging the said Alice through disputes and pleadings by which we hold ourselves ill rewarded.) (f. 114, a.)

35. To this the Convent replies referring to the recent pleading and to the charter of Edgar—"porchase (*procapiare*: to procure) *par Seint Oswald nostre avoné et par vous tres amé seigneur*"—produced in the King's court. A transcript of this document remains at the moment in the hands of the King's Justices, who have appointed a day on which the Convent shall receive what justice and reason demand. They therefore trust and hope that the King will not proceed against his own charter: "*Nous entendons et esperons en Dieu et en vostre tres amé seigneurie, que contre la fourme de vostre dite chartre par vous confermé, vostre tres chere seigneurie ne [ne] veult que nous soions chargé.*" (f. 114, a.)

36. The Queen also writes on 11th Feb. from Berkeley repeating the King's commands, and saying that they are seriously annoyed at the Convent's inaction: "*Nous sumes moult tres durement annoyés*"; and begging with all her heart that her lord's behest may be carried out: "*Nous prioms, tant affectueusement come nous poöns plus.*" (f. 114, b.)

37. The Convent return an answer to the Queen on the lines of their reply to the King, appealing to King Edgar's charter, and his grant to *Seynt Oswald nostre fondeur*. (f. 114, b.)

38. The patient King writes once more from Westminster on 8th March 1324 making the same explicit request: "*Vos*

rogamus . . .,” and promising, rather more definitely than in his first mandate, to shew favour to the Convent in return: “*Pro quo in agendis domus vestre vobis volumus esse promptiores.*” (f. 114, b.)

39. The Convent in reply beg the King to excuse them for their old reason of poverty: “*Nos excusatos habere presertim cum non voluntas sit impedimentum vestrum perficiendi rogatum, sed rerum inopia et malicia temporum prevalente.*” (f. 114, b.)

40. As usual, the Queen writes almost at the same time as the King, on 14th March, also from Westminster, also offering definitely to be very friendly in case any affair of the Convent comes before them: “*Et estre especialment tenue a vous et a vostre maison, si par cas vous aiez affaire devers nous.*” (f. 115, a.)

41. The Convent replies in exactly the same strain. Their excuses are genuine, their inability is real: “*Par quey, tres chere dame, vous prioms humblement et devoutement a ore, com sorent avomz fait, que par amour de Dieu et descharge de Seynte Eglise, deignez sovenir de les excusationes, que sorent vous ount esté monstré endroit de ceste requeste, et nous avoir excusez. Car nous poer est chief destourber sanz feintise¹ faire.*” (f. 115, a.)

42. Another month passes, and on 21st April the King writes from Langley. He refuses to accept the offer of 10 marks: “*Donat nous ne gréons point pour la petitesse d’yeel.*” It shall be ten pounds, granted under the common seal: “*Chargeons que de mesme les dys lires facez faire a la dite Alice voz lettres patentes sealees de vostre commun seal.*” And then follows a threat: failing obedience, the Prior, with four of the most important members of his house, shall appear before the King . . . to answer wherefore in the King’s despite he has not seen

¹ MS. *feintise*; certainly a scribal error for *feintise* (cf. *feintement*, the two words appear several times in the letters; from *feignere*, hence the sense of dissimulation).

fit to obey the King's commands, and to perform and to receive (in punishment) what is meet and just : "*Et si ceo nous, vous mandons que vous, avant dit prior, ad quatre les preindres (grandiores) et plus canéz (canare, to purify, whence past participle cané = noble) de vostre dite maison, soiez en propre persone devant nous mesmes, ou que nous soions en nostre rethue, a plus en haste que vous porrez après la recelle de cestes, a respondre de ceo que vous n'avez volu obeïr a nos dits mandementz en despit de nous, et a faire et a recevoir, outre, ceo q'en est de droit et de reson.*" (f. 115, b.)

43. This alarming letter was received on St. Mark's Day, 25th April, and was immediately brought before the Chapter. In answer to the first part of the King's letter the Prior replies begging to inform the King that the goods of the Church which they hold are held in common, and neither the Prior nor any other has the right to alienate anything ; that the common seal of the Church is in special keeping, by common assent ; that accordingly he, without the community, is powerless. He begs to be excused therefore if the sealed letters in question are not sent, for though he is ready in all things to do the King's pleasure, providing no wrong is done to the rights of their Church, in this matter he cannot act without the Convent's consent, and this, for all he can do, he has not been able to obtain : "*Deignez entendre que les biens de l'Eglise q'avons en garde sont en commun, sanz nulle severance retenir devers nous ou devers nul autre ; et que le commun seal de nostre Eglise est en especiale garde par commun assent, issint que nous, sanz la commune, ne poüons avenir . . . a la chose sanz dite ne porrons avenir sanz leur assent, quel nous ne poüons, par rien que faire porrons, avoir ungore.*"

For the second matter, the Prior will hasten, as he is commanded, to appear before the King and to excuse himself for the blame and other charge of impropriety attached to him by the King, by testifying to the many acts of benevolence performed by the Convent : "*A vous rewarons, le despit que nous est sarvys par nos meintz bienvoillantz creuser, et de tutes autres riens desaveuantes devers vostre seigneurie, ad (apud : avec) l'oidle Dieu de blamer.*" (f. 115, b.)

44. On the same day the Queen writes from Berkhamstead, but makes no fresh point. She renews her entreaties and promises favours : “ *Issin que nous vous en seioms tenue a mercier et bon gré savoir.*” (f. 116, a.)

45. The Prior answers, as to the King, that the common seal of the monastery is in common keeping, that he without the community is powerless, and for nothing that he can do will the Convent be persuaded to draw up the deed required ; their conscience will not allow them, for they fear that the charge may become perpetual : “ *Nous ne poöms la commune amener de lieu fait faire . . . pour rien que nous poöms faire, pour doute de leur conscience d'estre perpetuellement chargez.*” (f. 116, a.)

46. On 6th May, as we have seen, the pleading before the King was concluded, judgment being declared in favour of the Prior.

On 17th June the King returns to the matter, and writes again from the Tower of London, but his tone is changed entirely “ *Vous priöms affectueusement granter aucune convenableté en aide de sa sustenance*” ; and promises most favourable consideration : “ *Nous volöms estre le plus gracios seigneur es choses que vous touchent devers nous ; et ne volöms nyr que por choses que vous ferriez a ceste nostre requeste vous soit prejudice fait contre la tenour des chartres de noz auncestres avant ditz en temps a venir.*” (f. 116, a.)

47. The reply is from the Prior in person. He now offers a bargain : he will make an annual grant out of his own personal income under his own private seal, provided the King gives them a charter under the great seal undertaking that their house of Worcester shall henceforth be freed from such charges : “ *De nostre petitesse ferroms une convenableté annuele et ferroms un fait, bonement de nostre seal demeigne, issint que deigne a vostre seigneurie granter a nous voz lettres patentes sous vostre grant seal, que nostre maison de Wyrecestre ne soit mes chargé de tieux charges en temps a venir.*” (f. 116, a.)

48. The Queen on 17th June 1324 from Westminster again echoes the King's letter, but makes no fresh point. A marginal note says of this and the preceding letter: "*Est in coplino cum communi sigillo.*" (f. 116, b.)

49. The Prior, in reply, begs her to support their request to the King for the charter spoken of above. (f. 116, b.)

50. More than three months pass, and on 26th September the Queen writes from Witley to the Prior in person. She thanks the Prior for this grant from his own private money; but it is not enough, and she is certain that he could, if he chose, persuade the Convent to make a permanent grant. She pleads with him; and if he grants this, she will use her best offices with the King to induce him to grant the charter which the Prior desires: "*Si envoïons a vous et vous prioms, tant affectueusement comme nous poïms qe vous vueillez mettre toute la peine qe vous pourrez, sans feintise, devers vostre dit Convent por nostre dite damoiselle, et a ce que elle puisse avoir par an a toute sa vie les dys marcs que vous et eux li ottroïastes (auctoritare, to grant) nadguerres (naguère) a nostre requeste, et li en faire avoir voz lettres patentes seallées de vostre commun seal, et les nous envoyer . . . pour l'amour de nous. Et adonqz en voulons nous estre mout tenue a vous et a vostre dite maison. En d'autre part, si tost comme nous vendrons devers nostre tres cher seigneur le roi, nous mettroms devers li toute la peine que nous pourroms, a ceo q'il vous vueille granter ses lettres patentes en la maniere qe vous nous avez requise.*" (f. 117, b.)

51. The Prior in answer says that he has indeed already done all he could to persuade the Convent. At the moment several of the brethren were absent, and so it is impossible for him to do what the Queen commands. But as soon as they return he will again employ all diligence and will inform the Queen of the result by the present bearer, who is making a long stay in these parts. (f. 118, a.)

This closes the correspondence. An act of the Chapter of 14th April 1327 orders the cellarer to pay to Alicia Conan for her lifetime by half-yearly instalments £10 a year on condition that the house of Worcester be freed from corrodies henceforth : “ *Ita tamen quod occasione concessionis predictæ nos aut successores nostri de pensione seu sustentatione consimili in posterum nullatenus oneremur. In cujus rei testimonium sigillum nostrum commune fecimus hiis apponi.*” (f. 131, a.)

It is this undertaking which was ratified on 1st July 1327, as Patent Roll 1 Edward III. records. But, as we have seen, no record of payment exists in the only extant Cellarer's Rolls.

[The transcripts in full of the series of letters, and the abstracts, were made by Canon Wilson in 1915. Miss E. C. Jones in August 1915 undertook to revise the abstracts and add notes on the less familiar old French words and write a historical Introduction. She was occupied as Nurse in a Paris hospital during most of 1915-1916. She returned to England for family reasons in April 1917, and the Introduction was printed in May, a smaller type being used on account of the scarcity of paper owing to the war. The transcripts, in full, of the letters are preserved among the Additional MSS. in Worcester Cathedral Library. We owe sincere thanks to Miss M. K. Pope, of Somerville College, for her kindness in reading through the transcripts and for her opinion on some of the words that occur in them.]

